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What’s Really Hidden behind Country Music Lyrics?

Simply stated I am a country girl. I grew up in northern Michigan riding tractors, mudding in big old trucks, and going to family pig roasts where pretty much everyone was drinking and hooting and hollering. My weekends were the some of the best times of my life: bonfires, camping, and kicking up dust with our four wheelers. It’s pretty safe to say that I grew up listening to country music as well, in fact my first CDs were by George Strait and Kenny Chesney. However, country music has changed a lot from when I was younger. For example, country music has this new pop feel behind it and is loud and just as much about the base behind the music as new pop songs coming out on the radio. But something else also changed in today’s country music and that change is that now it is acceptable to put misogynistic words in the lyrics. Although, to be clear, these words are actually hard to notice in most of the songs because the words are hidden in the lyrics. Country singers do this by using words or phrases that you wouldn’t think to suspect the words of being misogynistic. Misogyny is a big issue in today’s society of the growing feminists out there in order to look at the depths of the issue I have conducted a survey and gotten answers to questions of whether people actually think that country music has misogynistic language within its lyrics, whether or not people believe that misogyny reinforces stereotypes, and in which genre of music they believe has the most misogynistic language in the lyrics. It has become quite clear in today’s world that women and men are not equals and are not even addressed in the same amount of respect being that this is a complete other topic that is very broad and has many different aspects to expand on, I chose to focus on something that today’s college kids have said they can’t live without and that they are surrounded by in today’s culture, music. I know that my two roommates and I all wake up to alarms but not the usual ones that just beep annoyingly until you wake up to shut it off but we wake up to a country song. I drive to class with my radio blaring country music and then I plug headphones in when I am walking to my classroom. Music plays such an important role in today’s society and with the younger generations that it is important to understand what exactly is being said to through the lyrics. I came into this project already knowing that misogyny is an actual issue and that most people choose to ignore this issue because if it’s there and they know it’s there they would actually have to deal with it. Misogyny in country music may not be a major issue but it is still an issue that deserves to be known and heard from everyone who chooses to listen.

“Country music – the third most successful music genre in the world after rock and R’n’B, selling 34 million albums last year – used to celebrate strong women, whose voices were heard far beyond the southern American states from where they hailed” (Carson 2015). The third most successful genre in the world- so many people are listening to this style of music. So many people are listening and still so many do not know what they are actually listening to. People get so focused on the beat of the music rather than listening to what the song is actually telling its listeners and I myself am guilty of this all the time. “Three acts now dominate mainstream country music: Florida Georgia Line (a male duo), Luke Bryan and Jason Aldean. They all conform to the sexist sub-genre dubbed “Bro-country” where endless, formulaic twanging is almost exclusively in praise of trucks, tight T-shirts (on women) and tanned (female) legs” (Carson 2015). While it’s not sexist or misogynistic to talk about trucks and praise them it is however to talk about women in tight clothing or barely any clothing, commonly they say in them Daisy Dukes or short shorts, and women with tanned legs. If you were to compare and look at female vocalists like Carrie Underwood, who is one of the only females that is actually played on the country music station and Lady Antebellum, a band with a female lead singer, you would notice that they don’t describe the men themselves and what the men are wearing but the actions of the men instead. Somehow in our society it has become acceptable to talk about women sometimes in such horrible ways. “No longer are women just companions in life, perhaps in certain songs a woman you love dearly. Nope, they're just objects to be drooled over. Seriously, is there any personality for any of the women in these tunes?” (Laman 2014). I just find this sad and instead of taking a step forward in the viewing of women from our past experiences we seem to be taking more and more steps backward.

Bro-country-this type of misogynistic language in country music has an actual name! The topic is becoming more and more talked about and seen that they had to give the bull crap a name. To be completely honest I am very disappointed in the fact that it is not just men who have written songs with this type of language in it, women as well have made very misogynistic lyrics. “The worst culprit of this kind of sexism comes courtesy of RaeLynn, whose tune God Made Girls is...good Lord, this thing is a mess of a song. The tunes entire purpose is to say that the only reason God made women in the first place is so they could "...wear a pretty skirt..." or be the only thing to motivate men” (Laman 2014). Like come on, seriously? It is bad enough when men do this but for a women to do this it is just disrespectful to their own gender. Like I said I grew up country and I have younger siblings and after reading these articles and blogs on bro-country I do not want my sister to get into this genre of music right now. It is just another way for society to say that the female gender is only good for their looks.

“Sure, George Strait, Conway Twitty and Garth Brooks sang about women and relationships, but the tone was much different. Classic tracks like "She Needs Someone To Hold Her" and "I Cross My Heart" have been replaced with "odes" to women that have much more misogynistic undertones, like Bryan's 2011 track "Country Girl (Shake It For Me)"” (McCarthy 2014). The song by Luke Bryan was huge in 2011, it hit the top of the charts within days of it playing on the radio. To be honest, I bought this song as soon as it came out and am just now really realizing what the song is saying, instead of just listening to the beat of the music and using the song to get me pumped up. Sad to say that I am probably not the only person who bought this song without realizing what lyrics I was actually purchasing. “For many people, it's difficult to see why seemingly innocuous things like insisting on calling grown-ass women "girl" and reducing the subjects of these songs to pieces of their anatomy are a problem, especially when plenty of women are crowding into stadiums to swoon over their favorite country boys” (McCarthy 2014). Like I said, I’m definitely not the only one.

This what I have so far, the graph I just threw in to see what it would look like.

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